DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 724 CS 507 299

AUTHOR Spicer, Karin-Leigh
TITLE Developing a Course in Communication for Elementary Education Majors.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; *Course Descriptions; *Education Majors; *Elementary Education; Higher Education; Interpersonal Communication; Listening; Nonverbal Communication; *Preservice Teacher Education; Speech Skills; *Story Telling; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Speech Communication Education; Wright State University OH

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a communication course curriculum for students majoring in elementary education which has been used at Wright State University for 4 years. The paper presents an overview of the topics discussed in the course (topics chosen for their relevance and importance to successful classroom communication): (1) process of human communication; (2) self-perception and communication; (3) speaking skills; (4) storytelling; (5) nonverbal communication in the classroom; (6) motivations to communicate; (7) expectancies in the classroom; (8) listening; (9) communication apprehension; (10) interpersonal communication; and (11) conflict. The paper includes a description of class activities and assignments. Thirty-three references are attached. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED324724

DEVELOPING A COURSE IN COMMUNICATION FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJORS

Karin-Leigh Spicer, Ph.D.
Dept. of Communication
Wright State University

* This paper was presented at the SCA convention in November of 1988 and was reviewed by Dr. Norma Shepelak, Ph.D., Wright State University.

CS507299

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Karin-Leigh Spicer
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

- Henry Brook Adams

INTRODUCTION

The education process is a communication process (Sorensen, 1989; DeWine & Pearson, 1989). In recent years, the speech communication and education professions have stressed the importance of a teacher's understanding and skill in communication. As of 1986, in forty-six states, competency assessments of teachers' communications skills were occurring (Joekel, 1986). The question to consider is what type of curriculum should be developed to meet student teachers' communication needs.

Traditionally, this curriculum was structured in the style of a general public speaking course. Student teachers were expected to present a number of speeches (e.g., informative, persuasive) and take exams. Lecture and discussion material focused on developing and organizing speeches and general information on improving one's speaking skills.

The basic premise of this course assumed that if a student teacher could learn to speak publicly, no specialized education or training in "classroom" communication was needed. This premise overlooked the fact that many student teachers had little classroom speaking experience. An

informative or persuasive speaking assignment was not the same as presenting a history lesson to a group of first graders. Discussion in other communication subject matter, such as nonverbal, motivations and teacher-parent conflict, was totally excluded. More importantly, future teachers needed to understand that even the most sincere and knowledgeable teacher will not succeed in educating students if s/he does not possess good communication skills.

Since this type of course is usually the only communication class education majors take, a curriculum designed to fit their specific communication needs would seem more appropriate. A course designed in terms of a public speaking curriculum would not cover the types of communication that take place in the classroom. Prospective teachers need information on what motivates children to ask questions or respond to a teacher's comments and why teachers need to project their voices so children in the front and back of the classroom can hear. Finally, these future teachers need to understand that communication plays a vital role in the success of a classroom climate and their understanding of communication's role will help that success.

This paper describes a course curriculum for students majoring in elementary education. This curriculum has been used for the last four years in the Department of Communication at Wright State University. When developing areas of discussion for this curriculum, a number of textbooks and research materials were examined. Syllabi from other

universities offering similar courses were obtained and used as guidelines.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

The following is an overview of the topics discussed in this course. These areas were chosen for their relevance and importance to successful classroom communication.

Process of Human Communication

The process of human communication is the first area of communication to be addressed. Current literature in the field of education generally accepts the premise that teaching is communication (McCaleb, 1987; Lynn, et.al., 1976) and the ways teachers view communication will affect the communication in their classroom (Cooper, 1988).

Misconceptions about communication, the process of communication and a model of classroom communication (Hurt, et.al., 1978) are explained and analyzed. This discussion is meant to give future teachers an overall view of the communication process and why there is a growing acceptance that communication skills are not innate--they are learned.

Self-Perceptions and Communication

Teachers' perceptions of themselves and students' perceptions of their teachers is the second area of communication discussed. Students'

perceptions of their teachers does have a major impact on how well those students will do in that classroom (Hurt, et.al., 1978). Teachers need to take a good look in a "psychological mirror" (Feezel, 1983) to understand how they think, feel and behave in everyday relationships.

Student teachers learn that the impact of perceptions on classroom communication can be a positive or negative force. Children will answer questions, respond to requests and participate in discussions depending on how they perceive their teacher. A teacher can be very knowledgeable on a subject, but if s/he is perceived negatively by students, s/he will not be as successful in teaching that subject had the perception been positive.

Speaking Skills

The third area in the curriculum is designed to help develop speaking skills which are a vital part of a teacher's daily activities. If a teacher cannot successfully communicate thoughts and ideas, students will not learn (McCaleb, 1983; Rubin & Feezel, 1985). Since very little information was found in this area, a speaking skills manual was developed for the student teacher's use. Many of the usual public speaking skills are explained, but they are adapted to the classroom environment. Such items as good voice projection, eye contact and use of visual aids are discussed. For example, teachers must speak loud enough so all students can hear. When teachers do not, students may not hear complete instructions, assignment due dates or simply lose interest in

the topic being discussed. When teachers maintain eye contact with their students, they show interest and can monitor minor misbehaviors (Cooper, 1988) without disrupting the entire class.

Each of the skills discussed are demonstrated and the student teachers are given opportunities to practice those skills.

Storytelling

The art of storytelling follows the speaking skills lectures. Storytelling is an excellent way to stimulate children's interest in books and in "reading" those books (Marchisio, 1986). Storytelling can also improve children's language skills, speaking skills and organizational skills (Koepke, 1990; Medina, 1984).

Since elementary school teachers will be reading to their students on numerous occasions (e.g., storytime, history lessons, reading lessons), this topic is included in the course curriculum. The history of storytelling, oral interpretation of literature, selecting books for appropriate age groups and unique ways to tell stories are discussed. Throughout the course, a variety of children's books are brought into the class and read to the students to give them an opportunity to hear and see different approaches to telling stories.

Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom

The area of nonverbal communication is discussed next. Nonverbal

behavior has an effect on the development and interpretation of spoken messages in the classroom environment (Wiemann and Wiemann, 1975). Nonverbal communication can also influence a student's task behaviors and socioemotional functions (Cooper, 1988).

The nonverbal communication segment discusses the use of classroom space (e.g., desks, chairs), body movements, touch, objects and the use of time in the classroom. For example, the arrangement of desks in a classroom affects communication. When student teachers are aware of this, they can select an arrangement best suited to their needs (e.g., teaching style, student interaction). Facial expressions can communicate much in a classroom. When not taken out of context, teachers can use students' facial expressions to gauge listening and comprehension. Students look to a teacher's facial expressions as reinforcers of the teacher's verbal comments. Seating arrangements, fingerplays and lesson schedules are a few of the nonverbal examples demonstrated.

Motivations to Communicate

What motivates children to talk in the classroom is the sixth area developed in the curriculum. Each school day, students initiate the majority of communication that occurs in the class (Hurt, et.al., 1978).

Some children are motivated to talk at different times during the course of a school day. Other children avoid talking in the classroom during group discussions. Still, other children who are normally

talkative suddenly avoid direct communication with their classmates and teacher. Teachers need to be made aware of the types of communicative problems that exist in the class so they can build a classroom environment suitable for communication. Outside events such as death, divorce, psychological or physical abuse also have an impact on what motivates children to talk and should not be overlooked by the future teacher.

Expectancies in the Classroom

Judging children by their appearances, self-fulfilling prophecies and teacher bias are issues examined in this area. A teacher's attitude can influence a student's learning process (Cooper, 1988). Teachers do evaluate and judge and this process can prohibit teachers from understanding and accepting students' abilities (Curwin and Fuhrmann, 1987).

Biases and prejudices are defined and shown how they can affect a child's communication in the classroom. Student teachers are given the opportunity to look at childhood photographs of successful adults (e.g., Nancy Reagan, Roger K. Smith) and to gues what they grew up to be. This particular exercise shows how you cannot judge children simply by appearances.

Listening

The importance of listening is the next area discussed in the

curriculum. When it comes to learning, listening is the main channel of instruction teachers use. Yet studies show that we retain only about twenty percent of what we actually hear (Shrope, 1979). Student teachers need to learn how to sharpen their listening skills as well as the skills of their students.

Distinguishing the difference between listening and hearing, knowing the barriers to effective listening and the teaching listening skills to children are discussed. Prospective teachers learn that children need to learn to not only listen to their teacher, but to their classmates as well. Listening to stories, radio plays and participating in art and science projects gives children the opportunity to sharpen their listening skills.

Communication Apprehension

The next topic discussed is communication apprehension (CA). According to McCroskey (1977), as many as twenty percent of school age children exhibit levels of CA. Major effects, causes and possible solutions are analyzed (Conner, 1987; Comedena & Prusank, 1988). The Verbal Activity Scale (VAS) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) are administered to the teachers (McCroskey, 1977). These tests are explained and results addressed in terms of improving the future teachers' communicative skills where needed.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is the tenth area included in the curriculum. Many researchers believe that teachers need well-developed interpersonal skills to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships in the classroom (Gazda, 1973).

Students' needs and the classroom climate are emphasized. Teachers need to understand that each child in their classroom is unique and has a different set of interpersonal needs. Why students must satisfy those needs before they are able to learn and communicate in the classroom are addressed.

Conflict

Conflict between students, teachers and/or parents is the last topic of discussion. According to Friedman, even though parents, teachers and students lives intermingle, the relationship can be a troubled alliance (1980). The difference between functional and dysfunctional conflict, parent-teacher conferences and controlling minor student misbehaviors are some of the areas highlighted.

ACTIVITIES

Time is permitted within the course curriculum for guest speakers (e.g., school board members, elementary school principals and teachers) to discuss their ideas and opinions on "what successful classroom communication is." These speakers give different perspectives on the

material discussed in the class and let students ask questions about their concerns as future classroom teachers.

Examples of storytelling and school lessons are demonstrated throughout course schedule. This gives future teachers the opportunity to see different and unusual ways to present material to children. Finally, throughout the course, students are given opportunities to speak in class through discussions and small speaking assignments. This gives prospective teachers a chance to express their opinions and practice their speaking skills.

ASSIGNMENTS

While taking this course, students are expected to complete two oral presentations: storytelling and a mini-lesson, and three written assignments (e.g., a teaching journal, teacher interview, lesson plan). The graded oral assignments were limited to two because of student enrollment (25 to 30 per class) and the time constraints of a quarter system. Working from the premise that by now these students are well-equipped to take tests, no exams are given. Emphasis is placed on improving their communication skills.

The storytelling assignment includes selecting, preparing and presenting a children's story to the class. The mini-lesson activity gives students the opportunity to teach the class on a subject of their

choice and at the age level the material would be appropriate for. The future teachers were graded on their presentational style, use of material, speaking skills, creativity and "handling of students."

The first of the three written assignments involved writing a personal journal to record the prospective teachers' learning and classroom experiences during the quarter. This is a chronological account. Students record their reactions to what went on in class, their learning from class and their plans for applying or transferring that learning.

The second written assignment, a teacher interview, had students interviewing a teacher (outside the university) of their choice. Students asked the teacher the following questions: 1) What is your definition of communication? 2) What is your greatest and weakest communication skills? and 3) In what area of communication do you wish you would have had more training? Students are then asked to give their comments to the teacher's responses and compare and contrast to the material discussed in class.

The final written assignment, a lesson plan, is in conjunction with the students' mini-lessons. The lesson plan includes objectives, materials to be used, lecture outline and exercises. The object of the lesson plan is for any other prospective teacher to pick up the plan and be able to teach from it.

On all three written assignments, students were graded on how well they follow the requirements and their writing skills (e.g., clear organization, accurate spelling, acceptable grammar). For example, it is very important that a substitute teacher be able to follow a teacher's lesson plan if s/he were absent.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

The last part of this paper is a partial composite of resources to use in developing a similar course curriculum. This list does not include numerous newspaper articles and magazine clippings that are used as examples, illustrations and handouts. There is also a variety of educational magazines and teaching journals that also cover the topics in the course curriculum.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this type of course curriculum can be more helpful to the elementary education student. Its focus on specific needs and problems in the classroom environment is more fitting to a teacher's needs than a basic public speaking course. Future teachers are made aware of the importance of understanding and developing good communication skills and their effect on the children and the class as a whole.

REFERENCES

Adams, H. B. (1980). Bartlett's Familiar Quotations. John Bartlett, (Ed.). Boston: Little, Brown and Co. Pp. 635.

Comedena, M. E. & Prusank, D. T. (1988). Communication Apprehension and Academic Achievement Among Elementary and Middle School Students. Communication Education, 37, 270-277.

Conner, T. (1987). The Quiet Child: Student at Risk. Academic Therapy, 22, 5, 523-527.

Cooper, P. J. (1988). Speech Communication for the Classroom Teacher. Scottsdale: Gorsuch Scarisbrick.

Curwin, R. L. & B. Schneider Fuhrmann. (1987). Is your teaching what you think it is? Teacher's Strategies. Springhouse, Pa.: Springhouse Corp., 2-11.

DeWine, S. & J. C. Pearson. (1989). Communication Competence Among Teachers: The Ohio Solution. Communication Education, 38, 372-376.

Feezel, J. D. (1983). Between Persons on Becoming An Interpersonal Communicator in Teaching. Dubuque, Iowa: Gorsuch Scarisbrick.

Friedman, P. G. (1980). Communicating in Conferences. Urbana: ERIC.

Gazda, G. M. (1973). Human Relations Development: A Manual for Educators. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Hurt, H. T., M. D. Scott & J. C. McCroskey. (1978). Communication in the Classroom. Reading, Pa.: Addison-Wesley.

Joekel, R. (1986). Tracking the reform movement. News, Notes and Quotes, 31, (2) 1.

Koepke, M. (February 1990). Telling Tales in School. Teacher Magazine, 30-33.

Lynn, E. M., Resources by D. C. Klieman. (1976). Improving Classroom Communication: Speech Communication Instruction for Teachers. Urbana: ERIC.

Marchisio, L. (Fall, 1986). Creating a reader through storytelling. The National Storytelling Journal, 21-23.

McCaleb, J. L. (Ed.). (1987). How Do Teachers Communicate? Washington, D.C.: ERIC.

McCaleb, J. L. (Fall 1983). Assessing Teacher's Oral Communication. Teacher Talk.

McCroskey, J. C. (1977). Quiet Children and the Classroom Teacher. Urbana: ERIC.

Medina, E. (1986). Enhance your curriculum through storytelling. Learning 86.

Rubin, R. B. & J. D. Feezel. (1985). Teacher Communication Competence: Essential Skills and Assessment Procedures. Central States Speech Journal, 36, 4-13.

Shrope, W. A. (1979). Speaking and Listening: A Contemporary Approach. New York: Harcourt, Brace Javonovich.

Sorensen, G. (1989). Teaching Teachers from East to West--A Look at Common Myths. Communication Education, 38, 327-333.

Weimann, M. O. & J. M. Wiemann. (1975). Nonverbal Communication in the Elementary Classroom. Urbana: ERIC.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Barbour, A. & A. A. Goldberg. (1974). Interpersonal Communication: Teaching Strategies and Resources. Urbana: ERIC.

Bowen, E. R., O. J. Aggertt & W. E. Rickert. (1972). Communicative Reading. New York: MacMillan.

Ecroyd, D. H. (1969). Speech in the Classroom. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Ratliff, G. L. (1981). Beginning Readers Theatre: A Primer for Classroom Performance. Urbana: ERIC.

Roloff, L. H. (1973). The Perception and Evocation of Literature. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman.

Ross, R. R. (1972). Storyteller. Columbus, Oh.: Bell & Howell.

Willbrand, M. L. & R. D. Rieke. (1983). Teaching Oral Communication in Elementary Schools. New York: MacMillan.

Wood, B. S. (Ed.). (1977). Development of Functional Compentencies: Pre-K - Grade 6. Urbana: ERIC.

Wood, B. S. (Ed.). (1977). Development of Functional Competencies: Grades 7-12. Urbana: ERIC.